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Combating the changing nature of gang activity in the suburbs will require new strategies, a summit of law enforcement and government officials was told Monday.

And the federal government recognizes it must play a larger role in assisting local police in dealing with the increasingly sophisticated threat posed by gangs, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said.

More than 50 local officials gathered at the Deerfield Hyatt hotel to hear Kirk pledge at least \$6 million of the \$60 million in federal funding for anti-gang programs will be spent in the 10th District, covering parts of Lake and Cook counties.

The need for the money is clear, Kirk and other federal officials told the group.

More than 3,000 gang members are operating north of Lake-Cook Road, they said, and they are operating with a technical savvy and viciousness unknown to suburban police.

“Organized crime is alive and well,” said Mark Prosperri, chief of the narcotics and gang section of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Chicago.

“Except that it is no longer the Mafia, the outfit or La Cosa Nostra. It is street gangs, and every geographical area is viewed as a potential market.”

Prosperri and representatives of the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms painted a chilling picture of gangs and their reach into the suburbs.

Federal authorities said:

- Most of the drug trafficking is controlled by street gangs, many with ties to international cartels.
- Heroin produced in Afghanistan is playing a larger role in the Chicago market and is more attractive to suburban users because users do not have to inject it.
- More than half the guns used in crimes in Illinois come from outside the state through a network of straw purchasers.
- Gangs are using computers and cell telephones more often, outdating traditional police methods of keeping track of them.

Kirk said federal agencies are increasing their coordination with local police and several task forces have been established between the two groups to combat gangs.

ATF is making the process of tracing guns back to their sources more accessible to local police, including a Web-based database that details what gangs are getting weapons from what suppliers.

“The key here is coordination,” Kirk said. “As the federal crackdowns on gangs in Chicago force the gang members into the suburbs, we will bring the knowledge we have about them to you.”